

## POSITION STATEMENT 2017

**The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) believes that improving the health and wellbeing of medical professionals requires the cooperation of government, employers, colleges, regulators, doctors' health services, senior leaders, supervisors, colleagues and doctors themselves.**

We each have the opportunity to make a positive contribution to creating good work environments and building resilient communities. The health, safety and wellbeing of doctors should be embedded and integrated into everything that we do.

While we have a shared responsibility for doctors' health, the RACP also believes that it is essential for doctors to take care of their own health, for their benefit and for the benefit of their families, their patients and the healthcare system.

The RACP encourages both our Fellow and trainee members and all other doctors to see their general practitioner on a regular basis and to model healthy behaviours. We also urge all doctors to monitor their own physical and emotional wellbeing, and to seek early assistance if they have any concerns or experience significant stress. Caring for other doctors requires sensitivity and we encourage doctors to provide support and assistance to colleagues in a compassionate and confidential manner.

The RACP is determined to take an active role with our sector partners to shape a healthier work culture for doctors and all health sector professionals, which will also benefit the health and safety of patients. The RACP encourages employers to adopt the principles of the College's Health Benefits of Good Work initiative.

**The RACP will improve doctors' health and wellbeing through:**

### **Leadership**

We are stepping up to lead cultural change and to work with our partners to promote safe and healthy workplaces and healthy behaviours. We encourage action to identify workplace hazards and to minimise the risks to the health and wellbeing of all health professionals.

### **Education**

Doctors' health and wellbeing is incorporated into the RACP's professional standards, curricula and Continuing Professional Development programs. We have developed eLearning modules on self-care and safe learning environments and will share more resources with our partners.

### **Standards and Accreditation**

Doctors' health and wellbeing will be included in the new Accreditation Standards and we will work with training providers to ensure the standards are understood and achieved

### **Advocacy**

We will advance the importance of doctors' health and the changes required to legislation to make a positive impact on the profession, patients and the community.

### **Adding Value**

We will provide value through: supporting all members to achieve better health during their career; sponsoring active research and pilots to improve the health system, environment and physician health; and provide opportunities to connect with other physicians.

# Executive Summary

## Updated RACP Health of Doctors Position Statement (2013)

- Doctors, like anyone else, need to look after their own health.
- As an important component of maintaining their own health, doctors should have their own general practitioner and undertake regular health checks.
- While doctors as a group enjoy comparatively good physical health, certain characteristics of the medical profession predispose doctors to special health risks.
- Psychological distress is significantly greater in doctors in comparison to the general population and other professionals.
- Doctors in Australia report substantially higher rates of attempted suicide and suicide compared to the general Australian population and Australian professionals, with suicide more common in female doctors.
- Historically, the medical professional culture has encouraged doctors to sacrifice their own health through accepted practices such as working long hours and taking work home. Increasingly, efforts are being made to address counterproductive workplace behaviours, and workplace bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.
- Medical training presents an opportunity to increase healthy practices, awareness of warning signs, and strategies to manage stress. These may translate into lifelong protective habits and promote resilience. Continuing professional development also provides an opportunity to engage with other doctors around the issue of maintaining their own health.
- When health concerns arise for doctors, they may be reluctant to seek appropriate medical care. Doctors may feel uncomfortable assuming the role of patient, and may opt instead to treat themselves or seek informal care from a colleague - this must be avoided.
- Regulatory frameworks are an important consideration, as mandatory reporting of impaired doctors can act as a deterrent to seeking help.
- Doctors are encouraged to seek independent medical consultation, and there is growing recognition that a particular skill set can be taught to help doctors to treat other doctors more effectively.
- Doctors' health advisory and referral services are important avenues through which doctors can seek help, and these operate in all jurisdictions of Australia and New Zealand. We welcome the action that regulatory, accreditation and indemnity bodies are taking to support doctors' health.
- Medical colleges have an important role as they engage with doctors in the course of their training and continuing professional development. The RACP has a number of initiatives underway and in development to support Fellows and trainees with health concerns, including a confidential support helpline.
- Action is required to identify workplace hazards and to minimise the risks to the health and wellbeing of all health professionals. We support raising awareness of mental health conditions, reducing stigma, supporting people with mental health conditions at work and creating healthy and supportive workplace cultures.
- Occupational and environmental medicine physicians and rehabilitation physicians have a key role to play in supporting impaired doctors to realise the health benefits of good work.



## WHAT DO WE OFFER?

### The RACP offers:

- a *Flexible Training Policy*
- training support for trainees who experience challenges
- online learning resources to help individuals practice self-care and build resilience
- guidance on *Respectful Behaviour in College Training Programs (2016)*
- collaboration with health sector partners to improve doctors' health
- a confidential support program for members, run by Converge International.

### We are working towards:

- new Training Provider Standards, Training Curricula, supervisor training and support, which include physician health, safety and wellbeing
- professional development for supervisors and Directors of Training to recognise signs of trainee burnout and how to support them.